

BIDDING CONVERSATIONS - WEEK 4
PREEMPTIVE OPENING BIDS AND RESPONSES

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INTRODUCTION

A *preemptive opening bid* is one that is made at a high level. The main purpose of a preemptive opening is to deprive your opponents of bidding space. A preempt also gives your partner (and your opponents) an accurate description of the strength and shape of your hand.

A weak two opening bid is somewhat preemptive because it takes bidding room away from your opponents (and your partner). But a *preemptive opening bid* generally refers to an opening bid at the three level or higher. Since there are no conventions in our bidding system that start with a three level or higher opening bid, a preempt can be made in any suit.

The basic requirements for a preemptive opening bid are:

- ✓ At least 7 cards in the suit with
- ✓ At least two of the top four honors
- ✓ 7-12 declarer (4-9 high card) points
- ✓ No side four card major

HANDS WITH LONG SUITS		
SUIT LENGTH	PERCENT OF HANDS	PERCENT PREEMPT
6	16.55 %	3.80 %
7	3.51 %	0.91 %
8	0.46 %	0.11 %

DETERMINING THE PREEMPT LEVEL

Because the point count system is less effective with a highly distributional hand, the best way to determine the opening level is:

- ✓ Count the sure tricks in your hand
- ✓ Overbid by a number of tricks that depends on vulnerability

COUNTING SURE TRICKS

When you count the sure tricks in your hand, you must assume that your partner has nothing to support you. The table at the right shows some card combinations and their corresponding sure trick count.

If you have a seven card suit with two of the top four honors, you can count at least five tricks in the suit because of the probable distribution of the remaining six cards (see Appendix A). If you have top honors you can count at least six tricks.

You can also count a side four card suit as one trick.

SURE TRICKS	
CARDS	TRICKS
A	1
AK	2
AQ	1½
AQJ	2½
AQT	2
K	0
Kx	½
KQ	1

DETERMINING TRICKS TO OVERBID

A simple guideline for determining the number of tricks to overbid is:

- ✓ Overbid by two tricks if vulnerable
- ✓ Overbid by three tricks if not vulnerable

This simple guideline is called the *Rule of 500* because you will not suffer a penalty of more than 500 points if you are doubled and go down by the number of tricks you overbid (see Appendix A). The Rule of 500 assumes the worst possible outcome:

- ✓ Your partner has nothing that will take a trick
- ✓ Your opponents double your preempt
- ✓ Your opponents set the contract

But in practice, your partner will often be able to help with at least one trick, the opponents might not double, and you might make the contract. So the odds that a preempt will give your partnership a better score than you would get if opponents bid and made their best contract are in your favor.

OPENING BID EXAMPLES

This example only has 11 declarer points (8 HCP + 3 ♥ LSP) so you should not make a **1♥** opening bid in first or second seat. But you can take six sure tricks, five in hearts plus one in diamonds.

- If vulnerable, open **2♥** (overbid two tricks)
- If not vulnerable, open **3♥** (overbid three tricks)

SOUTH - YOU
♠ 8 2
♥ K J T 9 7 4 3
♦ A 6 2
♣ 9

This hand has 9 declarer points (6 good HCP + 3 ♠ LSP). But you can only count five sure tricks, four in spades plus one in diamonds. You should pass.

- If vulnerable, you can not open **1♠** (overbid two tricks).
This hand does not have 13-21 declarer points.
- If not vulnerable, you should not open **2♠** (overbid three tricks). This hand does not have two of the top four honors.

SOUTH - YOU
♠ Q 8 6 5 4 3 2
♥ Q 3
♦ A 4
♣ T 8

This example has 10 declarer points (8 HCP + 2 ♣ LSP). You can count six sure tricks, five in clubs plus one for the four card diamond suit.

- If vulnerable, you can not open **2♣** (overbid two tricks).
Two clubs is a strong opening bid in our bidding system.
Pass or, if opening in third seat, open **3♣**.
- If not vulnerable, open **3♣** (overbid three tricks).

SOUTH - YOU
♠ 4
♥ 7 3
♦ T 9 6 4
♣ A K J T 8 6

This example has 11 declarer points (7 HCP + 4 ♠ LSP). You can count seven sure tricks in hearts.

- If vulnerable, open 3♥ (overbid two tricks).
 - If not vulnerable, open 4♥ (overbid three tricks).
- Some players would open 4♥ regardless of vulnerability, especially if opening in third seat.

SOUTH - YOU
♠ 7
♥ A Q J T 8 7 6 3
♦ 7 3
♣ T 9

RESPONDING TO A PREEMPT

A preemptive opening bid describes a hand that can take many tricks if the long suit is trump. But opener's hand might not be able to take any tricks if the hand is played in another suit or no trump. Consequently, you, the responder, should be reluctant to make any bid other than raising your partner's suit.

When you are responding to a preemptive opening bid you should evaluate your hand by counting tricks, not points. Unless you can count more than the number of tricks your partner has overbid, you should pass.

Suppose your partner opened the bidding with 3♥. The hand on the right has three sure tricks.

- If your partnership is vulnerable, your partner overbid by two tricks so you can raise the bid to 4♥.
- If your partnership is not vulnerable, your partner overbid by three tricks and you should pass.

SOUTH - YOU
♠ A K 6 3
♥ 5
♦ A T 8 2
♣ J 8 6 4

Suppose your partner opened the bidding with 3♠. The hand on the right only has two sure tricks (the ♣QJ are useless). Since your partner overbid by at least two tricks, you should pass regardless of your vulnerability. If your right hand opponent overcalls the opening bid, you could bid 4♠ to preempt your opponents but the *Law of Total Tricks* says that you are only safe competing to the three level.

SOUTH - YOU
♠ 6 3
♥ K Q 9 4
♦ K Q 8 3
♣ Q J 7

You can respond in a new suit with a strong hand (about 16 or more declarer points) that has an excellent long (usually six card) suit. Responding in a new suit below the game level is *forcing*.

Suppose your partner opened the bidding with 3♦. This hand has 17 declarer points (15 HCP + 2 ♥ LSP) and an excellent six card heart suit. You have enough sure tricks to jump to a game in diamonds. But a 3♥ bid describes your hand and forces your partner to make another bid. If partner rebids 4♥, pass and play the major suit contract. If partner rebids 3NT or 4♦, bid the 5♦ game.

SOUTH - YOU
♠ 9 7
♥ A K J T 9 7
♦ 8 3
♣ A K 3

PREEMPTIVE OVERCALLS

Partnerships that adopt the *Weak Two / Strong Two Club* convention pair usually treat an overcall that skips one level as a *Weak Jump Overcall*. These partnerships also treat an overcall that skips two or more levels as a *Preemptive Overcall*. A jump overcall to any level shows a hand that would have been preemptively opened at that level if the opponent had not opened the bidding.

Preemptive overcalls can be very effective because you know your right hand opponent has opening strength and it makes it much more difficult for your left hand opponent to respond to the opening bid.

COMPETITIVE BIDS AFTER A PREEMPT

If your right hand opponent opens the bidding with a preempt you can make a competitive overcall or takeout double if you have a hand with extra strength and the proper shape.

COMPETITIVE BID EXAMPLE 1

SOUTH - YOU			
♠ 7 2			
♥ AKQJ 6			
♦ 7 5			
♣ AQJ 4			
VULNERABLE			
East	South	West	North
3♦	3♥		

COMPETITIVE BID EXAMPLE 2

SOUTH - YOU			
♠ KJ 4 3			
♥ 5			
♦ AQ 6 4			
♣ AQ 9 8			
North			
North	East	South	West
Pass	3♥	Dbl	

COMPETITIVE BID EXAMPLE 3

SOUTH - YOU			
♠ AK 6			
♥ K 9 8 5			
♦ K 8 7 6			
♣ 5 4			
VULNERABLE			
West	North	East	South
Pass	Pass	3♣	Pass

- **Competitive Bid Example 1**
The hand has 18 declarer points (17 HCP + 1 ♥ LSP) and an excellent five card heart suit. Although you are vulnerable, you can risk a 3♥ overcall.
- **Competitive Bid Example 2**
This hand can support the other three suits and, since your partner would be the declarer, it has 19 dummy points (16 HCP + 3 ♥ SSP). If your partnership has agreed that a double through 3♠ is for takeout this is an ideal hand for the double. Note that your partner can pass this double if your partner is sure the opener can not make a 3♥ contract.
- **Competitive Bid Example 3**
There are two reasons to pass. You do not have a five card suit and you do not have enough strength to overcall at the three level.

REFINING PREEMPTIVE BIDS

The effectiveness of a preempt depends on your seat relative to the dealer. If you are:

- **First Seat:** A preempt is effective because you are preempting two opponents but only one partner.
- **Second Seat:** A preempt is less effective because you are preempting one opponent and one partner.
- **Third Seat:** A preempt is very effective because you know your partner has less than an opening hand. Your opponents have a majority of the high card points and might be able to make a game.
- **Fourth Seat:** You should not preempt in the fourth seat unless you are sure you can make a positive score. It is usually better to pass and move on to the next hand. But you can consider opening a *weak two* and you can apply the *Guideline of 15* to help you make the decision.

THE RULE OF 234

The **Rule of 234** is a more sophisticated way to determine the number of tricks that you can overbid. Instead of being based only on your vulnerability, this rule is based on your vulnerability relative to your opponent's vulnerability.

VULNERABLE		VULNERABILITY ATTRIBUTE	OVERBID TRICKS
YOUR PARTNERSHIP	YOUR OPPONENTS		
YES	NO	Unfavorable	2
YES	YES	Equal	3
NO	NO		
NO	YES	Favorable	3, 4, 5

For example, this hand only has 10 declarer points (7 HCP + 3 ♠ LSP) so it should not be opened 1♠. But you can count five sure tricks in spades plus one sure trick in diamonds.

VULNERABLE		TRICK COUNT		OPENING BID
YOU	OPP	SURE	OVERBID	
YES	NO	6	2	2♠
YES	YES	6	3	3♠
NO	NO			
NO	YES	6	4	??

SOUTH - YOU

♠ Q J T 9 7 4 3

♥ 9 6 2

♦ A 5

♣ 3

Although you could open 4♠ with **favorable** vulnerability, you should open 3♠ in the first or second seat because you do not want to completely preempt your partner who might have a strong hand. If you are in the third seat, your partner has already passed so you could open 4♠ if you are brave!

APPENDIX - BRIDGE STATISTICS

MISSING CARD SPLITS

Suppose your hand has a seven card suit and you do not know how many of the missing cards are held by your partner. This table shows the percent of times that one of your opponents holds the specified number of missing cards.

MISSING CARD SPLIT FOR HANDS WITH A SEVEN CARD SUIT									
PARTNERSHIP		MISSING CARDS SPLIT BETWEEN OPPONENTS							TOTAL
PART	FIT	6-0	5-n	4-n	3-n	2-n	1-n	0-0	
7+0	7	0.11 %	1.02 %	3.49 %	2.51 %				7.13 %
7+1	8		1.01 %	7.48 %	17.77 %				26.26 %
7+2	9			3.49 %	17.82 %	14.44 %			35.75 %
7+3	10				5.02 %	17.73 %			22.75 %
7+4	11					3.44 %	3.66 %		7.10 %
7+5	12						0.98 %		0.98 %
7+6	13							0.04 %	0.04 %
TOTAL		0.11 %	2.03 %	14.46 %	43.12 %	35.61 %	4.64 %	0.04 %	100.01 %

Note the following:

- There is only about a 7% chance that your partner will be void in your suit.
- There is about a 93% chance that your partnership will have at least an eight card fit and a 67% chance that your partnership will have at least a nine card fit.
- The chance that one of your opponents is void and the other opponent holds all of the missing cards in your suit is no more than 5%.
- There is about an 83% chance that **any holding** of seven cards will take four or more tricks because the worst case is one opponent holding the **AKQ** in the same suit.
- There is about a 40% chance that **any holding** of seven cards will take five or more tricks because the worst case is one opponent holding the **AK** in the same suit.

DUPLICATE SCORING - RULE OF 500

VULNERABLE		YOUR SCORE IF YOU GO DOWN DOUBLED				YOUR SCORE IF OPPONENTS MAKE		
YOUR PARTNERSHIP	YOUR OPPONENTS	1	2	3	4	3 ^{NT}	4 ^{MAJ}	5 ^{MIN}
		YES	NO	-200	-500	-800	-1100	-400
YES	YES	-200	-500	-800	-1100	-600	-620	-600
NO	NO	-100	-300	-500	-800	-400	-420	-400
NO	YES	-100	-300	-500	-800	-600	-620	-600